

1 On day 1, I came in expecting media and communications work, but found myself with tools and harvesting at Meridian One, the community garden. What surprised me was the split between social media work (my comfort zone) and on-site hands-on work (completely new). I learnt that growth happened on the uncomfortable side, and that **my first step was willing to start as a beginner again.**

2 Over the weeks, I picked up scything, spades and secateurs and worked across sites. I found myself being capable of delivering tool talks. **I understood my new learnings can be fused with my skills.** I took initiative and catalogued over 90 tools into a database, rebuilt the harvest log with 180kg logged.



3 different type of chillies harvested

I came in comparing my placement to others. What settled it was seeing the community this work builds, which I felt in the little things: a volunteer baking me a farewell cake, visitors enjoying the booklets I created, veg being taken home. **I learnt I do my best work when I am part of something, and that the best work is genuine, never extractive.**



3 I reframed two social pages from advertising into honest, community storytelling, writing for very different audiences. **I learnt to truly consider the people you are working for, and how you want to impact them.**

4 My biggest goal was to help TCV reach past its boroughs, and storytelling was my means. A hedgehog reel passed 70k views, and people arrived at our events saying that was how they found us. I saw the same at scale when the BBC came to film one of our volunteers. **I realised amplifying an existing story is what can get recognition, and leaders need to support that!**

5 When the reel went viral, it also drew hate comments. Although my instinct was to delete the video, my supervisor advised to keep it up and explained. I followed her directions while still making it clear how I felt about it. It became clear that leadership is about making yourself **heard**, but also having the **humility** to follow directions.

6 I made things nobody asked me to. I taught myself to make booklets, planned a new workshop, created a tool shed inventory. I ventured into areas I found hard, and delivered results in them. That is the part of the placement I am most proud of: **taking initiative.**

Growing outwards: what extending reach taught me about leadership

Dhenuh Karthik Rajan · Laidlaw Leadership in Action · The Conservation Volunteers



Leading my balcony gardening workshop